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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 0228

RUEKJCS/OSD WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 4846

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 000980

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [UNSC](#) [UNOMIG](#) [RS](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: GEORGIA: UK FCO DIRECTOR ON ABKHAZIA TRIP, NEED  
FOR U.S. LEADERSHIP

REF: A. PARIS 664

[1](#)B. BRUSSELS 356

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. During a visit to Tbilisi, Michael Davenport, Director of the Russia, South Caucasus and Central Asia Directorate at the British FCO, urged the United States to set a clear example for the international community on how to move forward on Georgia, in particular with regard to Russia. He noted the importance of the upcoming negotiations on a new UN mandate for Georgia, but he focused his comments on the key role the upcoming Obama-Medvedev Summit will play in setting the tone on Georgia policy for the foreseeable future. Although recognizing the importance of the broad range of issues likely to be discussed in Moscow, Davenport stressed that Georgia was of fundamental significance and must not be treated as simply one of many topics to be covered. He said that other international partners, in particular in Europe, would be looking to the U.S. for leadership. Davenport and British Ambassador Denis Keefe had just returned from Abkhazia, where de facto "president" Bagapsh downplayed internal criticism of Russia's growing influence and expressed general support for a new UN mission. The Abkhaz willingness to admit Keefe may reflect a bit more flexibility in seeing Tbilisi-based diplomats. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) On May 22, Ambassador Keefe hosted a dinner in honor of Davenport. Guests included EU Special Representative (and Swedish diplomat) Peter Semneby, French Ambassador Eric Fournier, Japanese Ambassador Masoyachi Kamohara, and Head of the EU Monitoring Mission (and German diplomat) Hansjoerg Haber; acting P/E Chief attended for the U.S. Davenport and Keefe had just returned from a trip to Abkhazia, where they met with de facto "president" Bagapsh and de facto "foreign minister" Shamba. Of note was the Abkhaz de facto authorities' willingness to allow the visit of Keefe, considering their publicly declared policy of not admitting Tbilisi-accredited diplomats. Keefe noted, however, that the press corps was noticeably absent after their meetings; the official statements released by the de factos focused on Davenport, with Keefe's presence noted only in passing. Bagapsh downplayed recent criticism by the Abkhaz opposition of agreements giving control of border control, the airport and railways to Russia, calling it opportunistic (in the runup to year-end elections) and hypocritical (considering the opposition's stated support for good Russian-Abkhaz relations).

[1](#)3. (C) The Abkhaz also expressed to the travelers their general support for a renewed UN mission to Abkhazia, although they had some reservations about the May 18 Secretary General's report on the situation. Everyone at the table agreed that the report had drawbacks, but that the key

point was to get the UN Security Council resolution and mission mandate right. Everyone also agreed on the importance of working together in New York to achieve that goal.

¶4. (C) The conversation turned to Georgia policy more generally, and Davenport pointedly asked EmbOff about current U.S. policy. He suggested that a strong American voice on the subject had been lacking of late, and that American leadership was critical -- both in the ongoing UN Qleadership was critical -- both in the ongoing UN negotiations, and in the runup to the Obama-Medvedev Summit. He noted that, with the ending of the Eurovision contest, the Summit was the talk of Moscow, with everybody hoping for a grand success, and that the meeting therefore offered a unique opportunity to send a clear message on Georgia both to Russia itself and to Europe. At the same time, Davenport expressed the concern that, with the long list of important issues that deserved consideration at the Summit, there might be a temptation to avoid a tough confrontation on Georgia.

¶5. (C) EmbOff responded that the United States remained firmly committed to Georgia, with President Obama, Vice President Biden, and Secretary Clinton all making strong statements of support in recent months. He noted in particular the inclusion of a paragraph on Georgia in the Obama-Medvedev joint statement from the London Summit; the President had made a point to emphasize Georgia's importance to the United States even during his brief initial meeting with President Medvedev. Davenport replied that the European approach has been somewhat different -- not just to include Georgia as one of many issues to be discussed with Russia,

TBILISI 00000980 002 OF 002

but to insist that the quality of overall relationship with Russia depends on Russia's actions in Georgia.

¶6. (C) Later, Davenport pulled EmbOff aside and apologized for putting him on the spot -- but insisted that it was critically important for the United States to take a leadership role on Georgia. He acknowledged that there are other priorities, but maintained that Georgia possessed a fundamental significance in the overall European security environment. He repeated his appeal that the United States use the Summit to convey to Russia the centrality of our concern and support for Georgia.

COMMENT

¶7. (C) We have gotten used to thinking of the Europeans as the soft ones when it comes to the Russia-Georgia confrontation. It therefore came as a surprise to have a Briton accuse the United States, in front of French, German and Swedish diplomats, of being behind the curve. Recent statements from other Europeans here in Tbilisi do indicate, however, they have begun to focus on the problem of how to convince Russia to act more constructively, with France, for example, looking to use visa and trade policy to support Georgia (see also refs A, B).

TEFFT